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# Letter to Dr. Exline Concerning the University Planning Committee

USM Faculty Senate

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# *The Faculty Senate*

of

The University of Southern Mississippi



May 10, 2007

To: Dr. Joan Exline,  
Assistant to the President for Accreditation, Planning, and Articulation

From: Myron Henry, Mary Beth Applin, Stephen Judd, and Amy Young, 2006-2007 Faculty  
Senate Officers

By a 35-0 vote during its May 4 meeting, members of the Faculty Senate asked the officers of the Senate to communicate to you the strong concerns senators have about the current activities of the University Planning Council (UPC). Involved in the discussion were a number of senators who are on the UPC representing the Senate or other constituencies. Each of these UPC members expressed numerous reservations about the continuing the activities of the UPC at the present time.

Officers of the Senate have been asked to emphasize that members of the Senate are supportive in general of processes that promise effective input and involve a diverse array of colleagues across the University. In that sense, the concept of the UPC seems to be a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, some senators, particularly those involved in the UPC, expressed concerns about the current membership and organization of the UPC as well the process for input and decisions

Specific concerns that were addressed in the Senate's wide ranging discussion include those that follow.

1. The form UPC members have been asked to turn in.
  - There may simply be too many initiatives to consider, especially given the compressed four-day review period and the work load many faculty and staff are bearing as the semester draws to an end.
  - UPC members have stated that they do not feel that they have sufficient information to make an informed decision.
  - There are difficulties, perhaps relating to the lack of clear instruction, about how to relate one initiative or priority to another: what criteria determine priorities and who will determine funding to specific programs or initiatives?
  - No resource parameters have been given. The form does not ask units what resources they will commit to new initiatives. It is easy to designate an initiative

as "high priority" if a unit does not have to commit any resources it manages to the initiative.

2. Senate UPC representatives are uncomfortable about the role of iTech on the UPC. They note that iTech the representative has only iTech as a constituency, whereas almost all other members have multiple constituencies to represent.
3. Senate UPC representatives are uncertain what "zero based budgeting" means in the context of the UPC.
4. The Senate believes that the roles of the UPC in relationship to the Academic Council and Graduate Council are unclear. Are there recommendations from the Academic Council and the Graduate Council on curriculum proposals?
5. The role of the Budget Steering Committee (BSC) still seems unclear:
  - How can this committee find resources for new initiatives without affecting resources for existing programs?
  - Will this committee be the real "decision maker," even though that is not intended to be the case?
  - What is the membership of the BSC?
  - How does this committee relate to the executive cabinet?

It is conceivable that an "expanded executive cabinet" might be better model for budget allocation purposes. We know that the Thames Administration has been resistant to that model, but perhaps the next administration might not. After lengthy discussion, the Faculty Senate strongly urges the administration to postpone further decision-making by the UPC until Dr. Saunders is president and has time to review and weigh in on what she envisions as a workable planning and budget process.

Some senators wondered if the short interval until the change of University leadership has been a driving force to quickly implement the UPC process. In any case, they believe the process seems too rushed to be fair and effective.

Since it is not known what a new leadership team will look like nor what techniques for planning and budgeting it may decide to employ, continued activities by the UPC at the present time seem like a questionable use of limited and burdened human resources.

Thank you for your understanding at this time.

xc: Faculty Senators